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FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6648
INFO RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA PRIORITY 4437
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR PRIORITY 1976
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE PRIORITY 7415
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0803
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 0400

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 002324

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/05/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [SN](#) [MY](#) [ID](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: JAPAN LOOKS TO BUILD MIDDLE EAST PROCESS SUPPORT
IN SE ASIA

Classified By: CDA James P. Zumwalt per reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: MOFA is considering a possible initiative to build support for the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) in Southeast Asia should MEPP discussions restart. Key elements of MOFA's nascent plan would be expanding the base of support for the MEPP beyond the neighboring Arab countries, strengthening assistance to the Palestinians, and creating confidence-building measures (CBMs). Initial soundings in the region found cautious interest. Israel's focus regarding the proposal centers on the prospect of improved relations with Indonesia. End Summary.

Broadening MEPP Support

¶2. (C) MOFA Middle Eastern and African Affairs Director General Toshiro Suzuki met with DCM and poloff September 16 to preview a possible GOJ initiative to form a MEPP support group with Southeast Asia countries. While cautioning that MOFA's internal discussions were at a very preliminary stage, Suzuki said the basic concept would be that once the MEPP began to move forward, the GOJ believed that it would be crucial to enlist broad-based international support and not limit such efforts to Arab countries.

¶3. (C) Toward that end, under the approach being considered by MOFA, Japan would seek to enlist support from Southeast Asia countries, including the principal Muslim countries, Indonesia and Malaysia) neither of which has normalized relations with Israel. The objectives of this initiative would include: building support for the MEPP; expanding assistance to the Palestinians; and creating CBMs among the parties. Should the MEPP go well, Japan would hope to see gradual improvement in relations between Israel and the Southeast Asian countries. The basic principle underlying the initiative is that Japan remains engaged in the MEPP and that the GOJ can provide value-added support to the MEPP.

Sounding Out The Players

¶4. (C) With this basic outline in mind, Suzuki said that GOJ had begun &brain-storming8 the concept with Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore during Special Middle East Envoy Yukata Iimura,s recent trip to Southeast Asia. Iimura,s interlocutors had responded with cautious interest. In particular, Indonesia has had some experience with capacity building with the Palestinians, Suzuki said, adding that Indonesia has had contact with Israel in the past but does not have diplomatic relations. Malaysia also expressed cautious interest. Singapore, which has diplomatic relations with Israel reportedly was cool to Iimura,s proposals but

did indicate that it could support the initiative on a modest level.

¶ 15. (C) Suzuki said that moving ahead with the initiative would be dependent not only on progress in re-starting MEPP talks but also on the views of the new Foreign Minister. Were MEPP to gain momentum, then the GOJ would seek to act. Possible components could include a Ministerial-level gathering and track II discussions should the concept reach fruition. At present, however, there remains no timetable for action.

¶ 16. (C) Suzuki said that the GOJ had only raised the idea with Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia but possible additional participants in a Southeast Asia MEPP support group could include Brunei and Thailand. He noted, however, that Israel was keen to have improved relations with Indonesia and that was, in fact, the hidden agenda of the initiative.

New Foreign Minister & Positive

¶ 17. (C) MOFA briefed Foreign Minister Okada as he assumed office and Okada's initial response was reportedly sober but positive, with MOFA acknowledging that Okada had been very busy during the transition period and may not have focused on this topic. During an October 5 follow-up meeting with Political Minister-Counselor and poloff, DG Suzuki said he planned to brief Okada again that week and that Iimura had briefed Senator Mitchell on the proposal during Iimura's recent visit to Washington.

Israeli Embassy view

¶ 18. (C) Israeli Embassy poloff subsequently confirmed to poloff that Israel's primary interest in the initiative is improved relations with Indonesia, with the possible exchange of trade offices as a first step. Israeli poloff was somewhat dismissive of the other elements of the plan -- building support for the MEPP and strengthening assistance to the Palestinians)- saying that elements were necessary to enlist the participation of the Southeast Asia countries but were not the focus of Israel's interest in the plan.

ZUMWALT